

Breakenridge
by Jane E. Golas

BRECKENRIDGE

Am I an old house? You bet I am. Not as old as some in this town perhaps, but a lot older than most, that's for sure. I've seen a lot of happenings in my day, have watched this small farming community grow into a bustling, industrial and transportational center. I've also watched as it has slowly declined into its present state. Don't know what the future holds for me, but, already my new owner has given me a new coat of paint and I look and feel wonderful. Of course, I do have a touch of arthritis in my floor joists and my center beam has a tendency of listing to port, but all things considered, I am still in great shape and am looking forward to the future. However, this period of waiting and change brings on the feeling of nostalgia and stimulates the memories of yesterday which I would like to share with you here and now. I will begin beyond my memory, for I feel that there is a kindred relationship between the land before and the land after I came into being. I still have the feeling that it is MY LAND and will always remain just that in my heart as long as I am around to oversee its destiny.

PART I THE LAND

It is most appropriate that we start with the land, for it was here on this same ground that the Town of Palmer actually began; not exactly within the line of my foundations, but most certainly within the boundaries of my original home lot.

It was here by the brook, that runs down from the mountain into the Quaboag River, that John King, founder and forefather, settled in 1716 and built a house and began a new life here in the wilderness.

The spot upon which I now stand was approximately the hub of the 170 acres as claimed by John King and, as the hub, it has overseen all of the events and happenings that occurred upon its kindred soil.

It watched over John and Sarah as they worked the land and built up their homestead and raised their fine family. It was saddened by the fact that out of the ten of the twelve children of John and Sarah who were to grow into adulthood, not one of them was ever to lay a "claim of ownership" to my home lot.

In 1742 David Shaw built a tavern upon the eastern boundary of my home lot near that trailside spring, where the John King family had camped the first night they arrived. This "Shaw Tavern" is well remembered in the history of Palmer for soon it became more than just a way station. In fact, many of the early settlers considered it to be "The Place of Reckoning". The reason being, in the early days of our town's history, the General Court had levied a £500 fine upon all of the landowners for being squatters on this Elbow Tract, as our town was then known. Many of these landowners had bought their deeds in good faith and believed that they were the true owners of the land. The fact of the matter is,

however, that the so-called brokers of the land (Lamb & Co.) were not the owners of the land, and therefore did not have the right of consummating a sale. The details of how this matter was resolved is a long and involved study for the true historian. However, the important fact remained that this debt had to be paid BEFORE any consideration of becoming a town could be initiated.

This important fact proved to be a grave influence upon the Town of Palmer, both politically and economically, and was the reason that John King, founder and forefather, was unable to witness the transformation of his settlement from that of the Elbow Plantation into that of the Town of Kingsfield.

The early settlers for the most part were quite poor, though never destitute, for they were a hard-working industrious group. The L500 debt, however, proved to be a great hardship for many of them and so repeated petitions were sent to the General Court asking for a Stay of Execution from this debt. Fourteen years were to pass before the General Court, whose patience had worn extremely thin, forced the issue by giving the following ultimatum to the landowners: "Pay up within two years or forfeit your land".

In the meantime, those Inhabitants of the Elbows who were in good standing, having paid their portion of the debt, were becoming increasingly

anxious for Township Rights and the privileges commensurate with this status. Therefore, they too applied pressure upon their neighbors to pay off the debt. It was because of this active bilateral pressure from both of these groups that the Shaw Tavern in 1747-48 became an instrument for the expediency of the law and the place where the debtor was forced to auction a portion of his land to pay off his debt.

Unfortunately, however, by the spring of 1752 when all of the extenuating concerns were in their proper order and the official application for Township was finally accepted by the General Court, the complete Township rights were no longer available for the right of representation to the General Court had been revoked; the name of Kingsfield had been claimed by another town; and John King, founder and forefather, had passed on to his final resting place (1744). So when the Elbow Plantation finally changed its status, it became The District of Palmer (a name chosen by the Governor, not the inhabitants) and had to wait until 1776 before it became an official town.

After John's death, Sarah, his wife, remained at the homestead until 1749 when she passed the ownership of my home lot on to the Cooley Family. The first owner was Moses Cooley, followed by Obediah and David and then in 1783, Jonathan Cooley, Sr. became the proprietor. Unlike the King family before them, where all of the children left the home lot never to return, the Cooley family remained in touch, however remotely, for the next 100 years. In the passing of these years many

changes were to take place not only within the boundaries of my home lot, but withing the lifestyle of my family as well.

It was about the time of the American Revolution that the first of the many physical changes took place upon my home lot beginning with the establishment of the Boston Post Road. The path of this road transversed my home lot from East - West thus dividing the land almost in h half.

This intrusion upon my land did not prove to be an adversity however, but rather a help, for it brought the outside world closer at hand and speeded up the wheels of progress that were destined to come.

The log cabin home built by John King had remained as the only residence of my home lot until 1799 when Jonathan Cooley, Sr., desiring a more refined place to live, built a large framed house. This house was located southeasterly of the log cabin near the same brook that ran down from the mountain into the Quaboag River. A few years later, the final chapter was closed upon the John King segment of my home lot story, when the log cabin was completely dismantled and evidence of its once being there obliterated.

A second major change in the land took place in the year 1804 when the Monson-Petersham Turnpike was built. This time the road crossed my

land from north - south, thus leaving my home lot almost quartered by the turnpikes, an irritating invasion to be sure from a farmer's standpoint but hardly a fatal one. As a matter of fact, this experience helped to condition all of us here on my home lot to the inevitable changes that were yet to come.

In 1814, Jonathan Sr., who was getting on in years, decided to divide my home lot into two parcels, selling the northeast section to his son, Jonathan, Jr., and the remaining parcel, which included the large-framed house, to his younger son, William. Jonathan, Sr. and his wife, Lucy, stayed on at the homestead with their son William, who, with the help of Laura Fenton whom he married in 1822, took care of them for the rest of their days. After the death of both of his parents, William, who had become increasingly more interested in land brokering than in farming, changed his vocation. In so doing, he gave up the Cooley claim to this portion of my home lot by selling the parcel to Eliphalet Tenney in 1833.

Mr. Tenney was a progressive man and encouraged business enterprise and community dwellings to settle upon this once open farmland. He promoted the use of the brook that ran down from the mountain into the Quaboag River as an energy source for the turning of an industrial waterwheel. It was discovered that this was not an original idea. While digging the foundation for such a wheel, evidence of an old grist mill, probably

built by the King family, was uncovered in the same locale.

It is quite evident that because of Mr. Tenney's keen foresight, that portion of my home lot, now known as Tenneyville, became a thriving independent business and residential community.

As a matter of fact, in 1936 and again in 1941, the residents of this community were able to lobby successfully with the directory makers and persuade them to list Tenneyville as a separate village of Palmer.

Here again we bring to a close another chapter in the history of my home lot.

Let's return now to the early years and pick up the story of the remaining portion of the land.

In 1817, Jonathan Jr. had married Sarah Brainard and built a small house upon the northeast portion of my home lot. This wee-little house was located north of both the large house of his father and the cabin site of the Kings, and it too stood by the brook that ran down from the mountain into the Quaboag River. After only 3 years of farming, Jonathan gave up the ownership of this land, selling the northeast parcel to his brother William. Jonathan and his family stayed on at the wee-little house, leasing it from William, until 1829 when the entire northeast parcel was sold once again.

My new owner was Azel Breckenridge, fiance of Eliza Smith who was a niece of Jonathan and William Cooley. In the following spring (1830) they were married, and moved into the wee-little house, thus continuing the link of the Cooley family ownership.

Palmer became a "Town" with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and, like the nation in which it stands, continued to grow....slowly at first, then by leaps and bounds.

Industry and railroads were an inseparable combination, each furthered the other's progress and together they formed a nucleus that affected the growth of the entire nation.

The first of these two dynamic forces which changed the lifestyle of the Town of Palmer was that of the railroad.

The initial railroute coming from Boston to Springfield touched the southern boundary of my home lot as it dissected the Tennyville portion of the land. This intrusion over my land, like the turnpikes before, opened the town to a new growth period bringing with it an increased population which stimulated many building activities throughout the area.

Industry, one of the largest of these new activities, began establish-

ing itself throughout the area, concentrating heavily in the villages of Three Rivers, Thorndike and Bondsville and less spectacularly right here in Depot Village.

Both Azel and Eliza Breckenridge were acutely aware of this population growth for they had witnessed the building of many of the new houses that now occupied the once open farmlands.

Until now, Eliza had been quite content with her wee-little house, even as her family grew larger: William 1831, Mary 1833, Charles 1835, and John 1842. However now, with all of the new building going on around her, she was able to compare her home with that of the more modern housing accommodations and she suddenly became dissatisfied. As a result, she gently but firmly urged her husband to remedy this situation forthwith.

PART II THE HOUSE

This is where I came into being. Azel, in addition to being a good husband and farmer, was also an accomplished carpenter which helped matters considerably under the circumstances. So in the spring of 1844, with the help of his young son William, Azel set about to comply with his wife's desires by building an elegant, commodious house, near to the wee-little house but on the other side of the highway. Later on, Azel built several other houses in Depot Village for investment purposes;

however, I was the only one that remained "The Breckenridge House."

A short time after the family moved in, another daughter, Jane, was born (1845). Then a few years later came Helen (1849), thus completing the family of Azel and Eliza Breckenridge.

In 1847, Azel had started a new adventure, that of Industrialist. In partnership with Horace Clark, Azel built a Batten Factory upon his own land near the brook that runs down from the mountain into the Quaboag River.

In three short years, however, Azel discovered that industry, specifically a Batten Factory was not to his liking and so he sold his interest, including the factory building, plus one acre of land, to his partner. Mr. Clark soon after built a house upon this one acre and then changed the line of manufacturing from that of batten to that of wagons. This change proved to be a successful business venture for many years to come.

During the Civil War (1860-65) the house of Horace Clark was used as a Waystation, and the open field between Clarks and the wee-little house was the camping ground for many of the transient army troops who were to pass through the Town of Palmer during those trying years.

Eliza's energies belied her small frail appearance thus making life at the Breckenridge House a very lively affair. She always managed to keep everyone hopping in one way or another, leaving little time for laziness or boredom.

In those days the church was the mainstay for any diversion from the daily routine of farm life, both socially as well as reverently. Eliza revelled in these diversions and being a Charter Member of the Second Congregational Church (1847) she felt an obligation to oversee most of these activities personally. Therefore many events took place right here at Breckenridge. These home gatherings were an important part of my life and proved both interesting and entertaining for all of us, even though at times, when controversial issues were under discussion, the rafters would literally ring. Oh, the stories I could tell about these early days with our town ancestors, some would really tickle your funny bone while others would make your hair curl. But this is my story so I'm going to tell it my way, concentrating upon the events that are directly concerned with me.

It's amazing how the tomorrows quickly dissolve into the yesterdays and the very young, seemly overnight, emerge into adulthood. Such was the case here at Breckenridge, for by the fall of 1857, William, already a schoolmaster these past four years, was now beginning another semester of teaching in the Orange, New Jersey school system. Mary, who had be-

come the wife of Judge Robinson, was now keeping a house of her own and Charles, with his new bride, Nellie, were settling into the wee-little house that they had just recently purchased from father, Azel.

I missed not having the whole gang around, however, the pace of continued excitement and adventure that had always seemed to prevail around Breckenridge ever since the day the family and I first came together did not seem to diminish. Azel continued to farm and to build, though most of his building activities were confined to the home lot in the form of outbuildings and additions to my main structure.

John and his sister, Jane, managed to keep the family on its toes with the normal trials and tribulations of the teen-age years, leaving Eliza and young daughter, Helen, a chance at last to enjoy each other's company, thus making the mother teaching and the daughter learning process a pleasant experience. The summer of 1858 brought another dramatic change in my life which left us all with a heavy heart. Azel had gone out to clear the brush from the brook that runs down from the mountain and into the Quaboag River when he slipped and fell and injured his knee. Unfortunately, he neglected to care for his injury properly and, as a result, a poison spread into his body which led to his early demise.

Azel's death created a mood heavy with grief here at Breckenridge, but

as the days and weeks passed, death gradually lost its sting and the peace of fond remembrance took its place.

John, now a lad of 16, became my master and took over the duties of the farm. Of course, both Eliza and the girls were most helpful in advising him as to "how things should be done". Because of their helpfulness, or in spite of it, the usual exciting life here at Breckenridge slowly returned.

1868 was another year of dramatic change in the lifestyle here at Breckenridge. In January, Janie married George Hastings and went to live at the Hastings Farm at Whipple's Crossing, while John in November of that same year brought his new bride Hattie Kellogg home to Breckenridge. John and Hattie stayed with me for 7 years and both of their sons, William 1869 and John 1873, were born right here in the birthing room just off the second parlor.

For over a year now, John had been a part-time farmer for he also was actively engaged in the manufacturing of wrought-iron chisels. He and his brother, Charles, had started the business together in a small shop located in Tenneyville near the brook that ran down from the mountain into the Quaboag River. But times were hard and the brothers, not being well versed in the skills of manufacturing, were soon forced

to give up their business adventure after only 2 years of trial and error.

John, having inherited much of Eliza's energies, became quite restless with the seemingly dull routine of farm life and so within a short period of time, he ventured forth once again upon a new career. This time he took to the "call of the road", and became a journeyman. His territory encompassed most of New England and his merchandise, a very popular item at that time, was that of custommade picture frames for Currier & Ives prints. It was lonely here at Breckenridge when John was "on the road", for sometimes he would be gone two or three weeks at a time. Thank goodness that Harriet and the boys remained here with us, for Eliza and Helen would have been completely lost without their lively yet comforting presence.

The Boston Post Road, as you recall, entered Palmer from the east passing through Blanchardville before it swung southward onto the now Tenneyville section of my former home lot. This route passed over two railroad grade crossings and with the vast increase in railroad activities, these grade crossings had become hazardous. Our town fathers, cognizant of this liability, made an appeal to the County Commissioner for a change of this highway route, so as to avoid these potential hazards. And so in the spring of the year 1872, Park Street became the

fourth permanent trespasser to occupy my home lot. In 1899, this same roadway was expanded and then taken over by the state to become a part of US Highway #20.

Another event which brought both joy and sadness into our lives took place in June of that same year, 1872, when Helen, youngest daughter of Eliza, became the bride of Charles Brainard. The ceremony which took place right here in my front parlor was lovely and the whole family was pleased that Charles had joined with them. The sadness came when Helen, the last of Eliza's children, left this house with her new husband to begin a new life. It was the first time since Azel died that a feeling of loneliness, briefly though gently, touched both Eliza and me.

But Fate had other plans for us all. For within 3 short years, the Charles Brainards were called back to Breckenridge and here they would remain for the rest of their lives.

The year 1875 brought with it many changes here at Breckenridge. Much like the game of musical chairs, where people exchange places with one another, so it was within my family. Beginning early in the year, Eliza asked Helen and her new husband to come back to Breckenridge and help run the farm.

Even though John and his family still were living here with us, John was gone much of the time and the chores of the farm were becoming too much for the women. Even with the help of a hired man, the great responsibility of running the farm was still upon Eliza's shoulders, and so it was a happy day when Charles Brainard "took over" the duties of the farm.

With the coming of spring, more changes took place. Charles and Nellie Breckenridge, who had been living in the Old Homestead just the other side of the road, moved to Fitchburg. Charles had taken a new position in that town and wanted his family to be near him. We missed Charles and his family for they were frequent visitors here at Breckenridge. We missed the family gatherings in the second parlor where Nellie played the organ and sang - for she had a lovely voice. But oh, what wonderful memories we'll have to keep for always.

This move left the Old Homestead vacant again and so, when Eliza made the suggestion, and Hattie gave her whole-hearted approval, the John Breckenridge family left my household and took up permanent residence in the wee-little house across the roadway. I missed them greatly for it was never the same without them. I missed that in-living personal touch, even when many times, where the boys were concerned, that personal touch was Ouch!

Of course, Eliza had been directing and supervising every move, aiding and abetting every action during all of these exchanges, much to the delight, if not dismay, of everyone, myself included.

But this is not the end of the happenings of this memorable year or of the events that were to change the destiny of Breckenridge. Jane (Breckenridge) Hastings had given birth to her second child in January of that year. However, she was never able to recuperate from the trauma of childbirth and three months later she died. During her illness her sister, Helen, cared for her new baby daughter and when Jane died, Helen and her husband Charles Brainard adopted the baby, Jennie, as their very own. Eliza was saddened by her daughter's demise but this sadness was tempered by the fact that once again there would be a "baby" at Breckenridge.

As the years passed, Eliza spent a good deal of her time with Jennie, guiding her in the ways of life and in so doing, she passed on to the child her strong will and determination, her unrelenting energy and perhaps some other not so exemplary characteristics. These traits were to stay with Jennie throughout her life allowing her to develop into a fine, strong, commendable woman.

The Town of Palmer began a new "rapid growth" period during the 1880's

THE LAND

KING - John and Sarah

1716-1750

COOLEY - Moses

1750

Obediah and David

1754

Jonathan Sr.

1783

SOUTH

THE LAND WAS DIVIDED

NORTH

COOLEY - WILLIAM
WILLIAM

1814
1820

COOLEY - JONATHAN JR.
WILLIAM

WILLIAM

1829

BRECKENRIDGE - AZEL

WILLIAM

1830

BRECKENRIDGE - AZEL -
ELIZA (COOLEY) SMITH

TENNEY - ELIPHALET

1833

children: WILLIAM

JOHN

MARY

CHARLES

JANE - married George Hastings
dau. Jennie

HELEN - married Charles Brainard
adopted Jennie

1902

BRAINARD - JENNIE

1946

JOHNSON - THOMAS + HELEN

1975

MULLEN - JOHN



Azel Breckenridge circa 1858

Eliza Breckenridge circa 1895

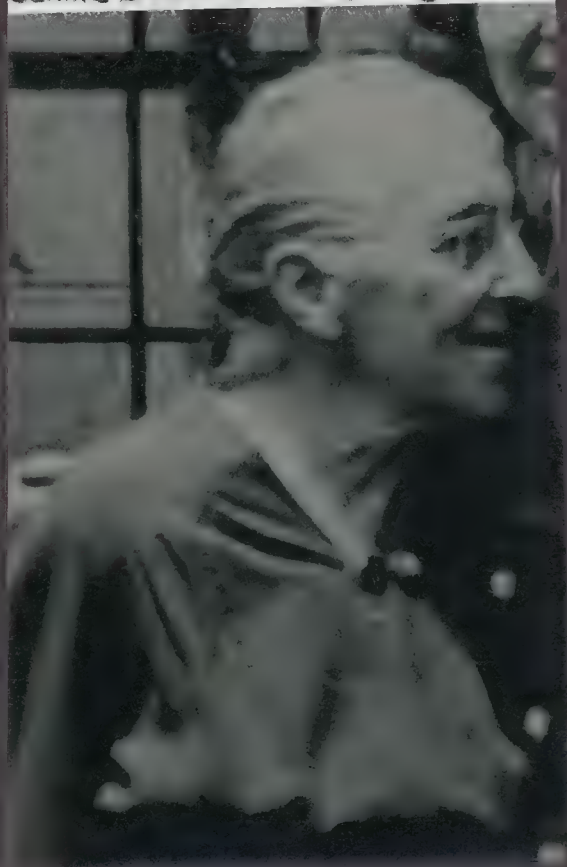


changed his career once again. This time working out of his own home,

William Breckenridge circa 1896



Jennie Brainard 1945 Age 70





Breakenridge 1910



WEE LITTLE HOUSE 1910 BUILT 1817



Clark House BUILT 1850 USED AS WAY STATION 1860-65



WEE LITTLE HOUSE 1978

and Charles Brainard became an influential part of that growth. As a Selectman he helped with the design and plan of the future of Palmer and many of those plans were made right here at Breckenridge. For during those "Selectman years", 7 alltold, I was frequently required to host the political meeting, which I may add were not unlike the church meetings that Eliza had conducted a few years back, for they also were very verbal and often dissenting. But life at Breckenridge had never been status quo and change had always been the rule rather than the exception and so this change to "the political life" was a rather easy and pleasant transformation.

In the meantime John, having become tired of the journeyman's life, changed his career once again. This time working out of his own home, he began a decorating business, specializing in wallpapering and painting. It wasn't long, however, before he became acutely aware of how wee-little his house really was, not only were the living quarters cramped, but the business quarters were impossible. So it was not a complete surprise to anyone, when in the summer of 1880, John was granted permission by Eliza to build another much larger house upon the home lot just to the west of the wee-little house.

With the moving of the John Breckenridge family into their new home, the wee-little house became vacant once again. It remained so until 1886 when William, retiring from the New Jersey school system, returned

to Palmer and settled in at the Old Homestead.

It was a joy having so many of the family near at hand once again. However, this joy was short-lived. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away and this time Helen was the chosen one. Helen's death left an atmosphere of depression and gloom over Breckenridge, for Eliza was grieving for her second daughter; Jennie, for her second mother, and the rest of us for a dear and beloved companion.

The panacea of time was hastened, however, by the instrument of change, when, that following spring, Aunt Julia came to live with us here at Breckenridge. Julia had been living with her brother, Eli Smith at the family homestead near Forest Lake. But Eli passed away during the winter of 1888, and so Julia chose to sell the farm and come here to live with her sister, Eliza. Aunt Julia was as calm and gentle as Eliza was bustling and energetic and the two of them together made for a very lively household. Jennie seemed to thrive in this climate of contrast, as we all did, for joy had returned to Breckenridge.

Another six years were to pass without any noteworthy incidents taking place; then Uncle William, who had been living alone at the Old Homestead across the highway, joined us here at Breckenridge.

And so, in 1893, another chapter of family history was closed, for when William moved out of the Old Homestead, the wee-little house was never to be occupied by family again.

December 30, 1898, Eliza, who had been ill with the grippe for more than a week, succumbed to her malady in this, her 88th year. Her death brought to a close the forty year reign of "Eliza, Mistress of Breckenridge."

William then became my master, but his reign was but a brief interlude which was terminated with his untimely death in the summer of 1902. Strangely enough, his demise, like his father's before him, came about (1) in the month of August and (2) as the result of a fall into the brook that runs down from the mountain into the Quaboag River.

With William's death the name of Breckenridge as owner of my estate came to a close. However, the lineage of Breckenridge remained, for Jennie Eliza Brainard, niece of William and granddaughter Azel and Eliza Breckenridge, became my new conservator.

Many old timers speak of me as "The Charles Brainard House". This I never was. For not only was Jennie my owner, she was the absolute head of this household, which incidentally she ruled with a velvet

glove. Charles was an important member of society, both politically (a Selectman for seven years) and as a businessman but it was Jennie who was the keeper of the keys for all of the family throughout their remaining days.

Those who remember Jennie think of her as the classic Victorian lady, this she was and then some. For she was a character in every sense of the word. She was pious and taught Sunday school for over 40 years, but she was fun-loving, too and had a twinkle in her eye for the gentlemen she held dear. She was kind and philanthropic and fond of children (they called her Aunt Jennie). She kept a special toy box here at Breckenridge filled with wooden animal toys for the neighbors' children whenever they would stop by for a visit. And many times she took in and cared for these same neighbors' children in times of family crisis. Then too she also shares her home with friends who, in times of illness, needed watchful care during convalescence. She was aggressively energetic in everything she did; she worked hand and hand with her father, Charles, helping with the farm chores. In the summer months, she took an active part in the haying of the fields with both scythe and pitchfork. In the winter you would see her working with her father harvesting ice from the large pond which lay just to the west of Breckenridge between John's house and Pinney Street. Charles was the owner and operator of this ice business for many years until he sold out in 1895 to Mr. Northop.

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Jennie was an avid horsewoman with both the saddle and the buggy, and did not consider it to be beyond her dignity to engage in an impromptu race whenever one of the neighbors might pose a challenge.

Later on, when the automobile came into its own, she also took on this vehicle. Of course she drove it in the same manner as she did the horse, never caring whether the road went the way that she did or not. Fortunately, the traffic was relatively light and the neighbors learned to STAY OUT OF HER WAY whenever she hit the road (or thereabouts).

Jennie was also a good businesswoman and could see the end of the days farming here at Breckenridge. Charles was getting on in years, and would soon be retiring or at least cutting back on his activities, so she decided to expand her role as landlord. Having already successfully rented out the Old Homestead a few years before, she proposed that a small section of her land that lay to the east of Breckenridge be sectioned off and a two story, 8 room house be erected.

It was during the building of the new house that Aunt Julia left Breckenridge. She had fallen and broken her hip two years before and never again was able to regain her health fully. So, on December 29, 1908, exactly ten years (less a few hours to the very day), she joined her sister, Eliza.

Following Aunt Julia's death, John, now retired and living alone in the house he had built to the west of the Old Homestead, asked that he might return to Breckenridge. His wife, Hattie had died in 1900 and both of his sons were married and living in the State of New Jersey. John stayed on with us here until 1920, his 80th year, then he too moved to New Jersey to live with his sons. This was not the last we saw of John, however, for every summer for many years to come, he would return here to Breckenridge and renew old acquaintances and talk of the "Good Old Days". John lived to be 100 years, and strangely enough, he too, like the other Breckenridge men died in the month of August.

During the years 1909 - 1910, there were a rash of fires that plagued the Town of Palmer. Many of them proved to be the work of an incendiary. Whether or not my barn was one of his victims, we'll never know. However, on November 19th, 1909 around 10:00 P.M. when both Charles and Jennie were in town, a mysterious fire broke out which reduced the barn to ashes. One horse was led from the burning structure by the hired man, who was home at the time, but all else, both livestock and property were lost.

A barn is the second most important component on a farm, the first of course being the farmer. Therefore the following spring a new and somewhat larger structure was erected upon the same foundation. This

new barn was quite elegant as barns go. However it will never be able to relate the aura of permanence that "the old turn of the 19th century" barns command.

In 1911 a dear friend of Jennie's died leaving four small children with their hard-working but rather inept (as far as raising young children was concerned) father. With a compassion for the plight of these youngsters Jennie volunteered to take in the little three year old girl as her ward and provide for her upbringing; and so it was that Helen Weeks became a part of my family.

Jennie thought the world of Helen as did her father, Charles and Uncle John. Life at Breckenridge once again took on the flavor of mischief and frivolity that seems to wane when a household is made up of only senior citizens. Helen grew by leaps and bounds under the loving guidance of this trio and it seemed like no time at all to me when she was off to Teacher's College in Framingham, returning only for the summer months.

John left for New Jersey about the same time Helen left for college leaving Jennie and her father to carry on at the farm and life within my walls, once again slowed down to a tolling pace.

When Helen graduated from College with a BS degree in home economics,

she returned here to Breckenridge. What a delightful surprise it was to all of us when, shortly thereafter, she and Aunt Jennie announced that they were opening the "Colonial Coffee House" so that Helen might practice her newly-acquired talents. The second parlor was converted into a dining room and overnight guests were placed in the two front bedrooms at the top of the stairs. What a wonderful change this was for us all. Life became so exciting and interesting once again; everyone was pleased with this new venture for we made money too.

Helen stayed on with us for another year before she was married. However by this time, Aunt Jennie had taken a fancy to the Coffee House idea and the company it provided, so she chose to carry on with its operation after Helen left, using hired girls to help out in the dining room. One of the girls named Ann Tulip remained with Aunt Jennie for eight years.

In the meantime, Charles, who had retired in 1921, enjoyed the goings-on of the Coffee House and the change in climate it provided. However, he was to enjoy only the first half of its existence for he passed away in 1936 at the grand old age of 92.

At the beginning of the new year, 1940, Aunt Jennie and I were all that remained of the Colonial Coffee House entourage, for Ann (Tulip) Dewey (married a few years before) had recently moved away and all other members of our family were either out of town or out of this world.

Aunt Jennie was still a very lively and energetic person despite her 65 years. However, this was her first experience of living and working the Coffee House all by herself. An experience she soon discovered that was not much to her liking and so she set about to remedy this situation by inviting Mabel Johnson Wolliscroft to come, join us here at Breckenridge and make this her home.

Mabel had always been a favorite of Aunt Jennie, a protege, you might say, who worked with her in the Sunday school. The church was a very important part of Aunt Jennie's life and anyone who shared this life was favored greatly by Aunt Jennie.

When Mabel came to us, she did not come alone. In fact over the years, she would bring to us three persons, each dear and memorable in our lives.

The first was Hazel Blanchard, Mabel's young niece, who had lived with the family for many years. The two girls set up housekeeping in the ell of Breckenridge, where Aunt Jennie had made over the former milk-room and storage shed into three very pleasant, liveable rooms; two bedrooms and a sitting room.

Hazel stayed with us until fall, when she married and left Breckenridge. Aunt Jennie asked Mabel to join her in the Main House for the winter

months after Hazel left, reserving for her the two rooms at the top of the stairs. The smaller room on the right, with the spool bed, was to be her bedroom, and the larger one on the left was to be her sitting room. During the height of the tourist season, however, Mabel would relinquish these rooms and return temporarily back into the ell of the house.

Mabel became an important part of our lives here at Breckenridge for she was a dear friend and companion to both Aunt Jennie and myself and we looked upon her as family.

Aunt Jennie, like her grandmother, was a born organizer with a compelling interest in any and all family affairs. Therefore, it was only fitting and proper, or so she reasoned, that she should take on the role of "Matchmaker" between Mabel and Albert Brown. Albert, like Mabel, had been a favorite of Aunt Jennie and had worked with her at many of the church activities. He was a handsome, fine young man and she could see no reason why these two young people, whom she dearly loved should not be joined together.

Albert, at this time, like so many other young men was in the service (U.S. Army) and his "at home time" was dictated by his available leave. Whenever he was home, Aunt Jennie would contrive all sorts of ingenious situations that might encourage these two young people to get together,

for she was certain that they were made for each other. Fate being what it is, it just so happened that Mabel and Albert came to the same conclusion in spite of, NOT because of Aunt Jennie's meddling.

In 1941, Mabel and Albert were married. War time seemed to be a time of closeness and sharing for everyone, for the future was so uncertain. Both Albert and Mabel demonstrated this feeling by including both Aunt Jennie and myself in their happiness. Albert's stays at Breckenridge were few in number. However, the memory of them would remain with us always; for the following spring Albert was sent overseas and never returned to us again.

In May, 1945, it was with heavy heart that we listened as Mabel read the telegram from the War Department..."We regret to inform you... your husband...Albert Brown...killed in action...".

The tragedy of Albert Brown hung like a veil over this household for many months, almost suffocating in its intensity. Then gradually, little by little, it began to lift releasing as it did so all of the wonderful memories of Albert in our lives.

During these trying days, the Colonial Coffee House was a godsend for it provided an active outlet for all of our frustration and despairs. Of course, Mabel's job at the bank provided some diversion, but it

was the Coffee House activities that filled the lonely afterhours.

Throughout the fall and winter months we had the usual turnover of transit roomers...truck drivers and salesmen mostly. However with the coming of spring, the tourist returned. Many of our guests were annual visitors who would stop by each season as they travelled through the countryside.

One such guest was "Miss Hunter", dean of Hunter College in New York State. She and her maid and her little dog, Fluffy, would stay overnight with us each summer as they travelled to and from the Cape. Miss Hunter was a character in her own right, much the same as Aunt Jennie, which might explain Aunt Jennie's tolerance to Miss Hunter's eccentricities. One example of this tolerance concerned the little dog.

Miss Hunter would insist that Fluffy be served breakfast in the dining room at the same time as she was served and that the breakfast consist of porridge and warm milk. Aunt Jennie went along with this arrangement without blinking an eye, as long as Miss Hunter did not insist that Fluffy be served at the table.

For sometime now, Mabel had become more and more discontented with her limited job opportunities. She began to realize that the only way for improvement was through education; so in the fall of 1944, Mabel enrolled at the New England Medical Center in Boston as an apprentice

medical secretary. Aunt Jennie was so proud of Mabel, for she had always been a firm believer in education and women's self reliance. However, this new schedule meant that Mabel would stay in Boston during the week, returning here to Breckenridge only on the weekend.

Because Mabel was concerned about Aunt Jennie's staying alone, she suggested that perhaps her brother, Jack, who at that time was living a bachelor's life, come to stay at Breckenridge and be our companion. Aunt Jennie was very receptive to Mabel's suggestion, for she had always liked Jack and thought him a pleasant and industrious young man. Jack moved into the ell, taking over the summer quarters where Mabel had stayed previously. Jack proved to be a very favorable addition to our household for he willingly shared in all of our trials and tribulations.

By the summer of 1945, World War II had come to an end and the confusion of peace time had made its beginning. Hundreds of thousands of young people were now leaving the Armed Services and returning to civilian life. This transformation period created a situation where the volume of available workers far exceeded the volume of available job openings in any one hometown. Thus, the highways and byways became an active conveyor, ushering prospective employees from place to place. Happily, Breckenridge was to share an active part in this dramatic period, for many of our house guests were the so-named transients.

Aunt Jennie loved the excitement which prevailed throughout the fall and winter and, despite her 71 years, kept up admirably, often out enduring the rest of us with her lively attentiveness.

However, about mid-December, Aunt Jennie began feeling poorly. She had come down with "an old fashioned cold", or so she thought, and was having great difficulty recovering her vitality. Therefore, it was with great reluctance that she finally submitted to the doctor's orders "that she go to bed and rest". Unfortunately, Aunt Jennie had pushed herself beyond her strength and on December 27, 1945, she succumbed to her illness.

As my last official act as the Home of Breckenridge, I once again became the sentry who kept the vigil over the casket in the front parlor, where Aunt Jennie lay in repose, awaiting that last farewell. I had played this role many times before throughout the 101 years of my existence, for the front parlor was used by every member of my Breckenridge family who had gone before.

With the passing of Aunt Jennie, my heritage passed, also. For she was the last of the Breckenridge family to be the master of my fate. Having left no will and no immediate family, the estate passed into the hands of distant relatives who assumed no interest in continuing the family homestead. Instead, they relinquished the Breckenridge

tradition and sold out all properties to a Real Estate Broker.

The Broker, in turn, then sold the four Breckenridge houses individually and divided the remaining tract of land into building lots, which he named Brainard Heights.

Though my heritage had ended, all was not lost; for my new owners were delightful people who revived the Colonial House concept adding their own creative ideas to its operations.

Both Mabel and John had remained at Breckenridge after Aunt Jennie died, and continued to oversee the property while it was in its transitory state. Therefore, when Tom and Helen Johnson purchased Breckenridge, they inherited Mabel and John as tenants.

Helen possessed a vivacious nature which was tinted with rose-colored glasses; therefore, she would often see, at first glance, a little less of the fact and a little more of the imagination than was actually there. With this thought in mind, let me reiterate, in Helen's own words, her thoughts and feelings at the time she was first introduced to me. "When I first saw the house I thought -- this is about as close to the White House as I'll ever get -- it's so big -- so grand --so interesting -- so New England."

However, after the first week or two of residence -- my imperfections came to light and reality set in. Noted were the 3 - 4 layers of badly soiled wallpaper and, as if in contrast, only a hint of paint upon my woodwork.

Being possessed of an undaunted nature as well as an optimistic viewpoint, Helen, with the help of her husband Tom and tenants, Mabel and John, set about to give a wallpaper-stripping party. A large group of friends were invited for this work - play affair, and everybody had a marvelous time. Unfortunately, not much work was accomplished, for only one of the 14 rooms was denuded.

Eventually, Tom and Helen, with the help of friends, now only one or two at a time, however, did complete the redecorating job. As a result of their efforts, I really began to take on the style of the White House, for I, too, had my Blue Room -- Green Room -- Yellow Room, etc.

Helen ran the Colonial House more like an Inn than just an overnight tourist stop as Aunt Jennie had done. However, she kept the accommodations the same, that is bed and breakfast only. Several of the now prominent businessmen of Palmer were once "Roomer at Breckenridge" before they became members of our local society. In addition to the businessmen, we also had celebrities, both famous and infamous, staying

here with us. The most prominent person being Todd Duncan, concert and operatic singer.

In the spring of 1948, the Town of Palmer had supported the Quaboag Community Concert Association, an organization dedicated to the enhancement of cultural appreciation. Mr. Duncan, a famous American baritone, was an invited guest of this association, and gave a recital at the High School auditorium for the benefit of the public. He also gave a second, brief recital in my front parlor by the old organ for the benefit of all of us here at Breckenridge. Oh, it was Wonderful!

Mabel and brother John stayed on at Breckenridge for about a year, then they went their separate ways. After they left, Helen had the ell remodeled and renamed it the Carriage House, using it strictly for the overnight tourist guests.

Business continued to be very good up until about the late 1950's and early 1960's, when the newly completed Mass. Turnpike became the major tourist travel route, and the Boston Post Road became the secondary route.

Then, too, there was another intervention which seemed to mark the final decline and fall of our tourist home, that being the introduction and popularity of the motel concept.

Helen and Tom continued to stay on here at Breckenridge after the Inn closed, enjoying, for the first time, the house all to themselves. However, 14 rooms for just two people is a little much, if only in attempting to keep it in good repair. So with mixed emotions, the decision was made, and Tom and Helen put Breckenridge up for sale. What my new owner, John Mullen, has in mind for me in the future, only time will tell -- but the fact that he has not discarded my potential promise for continued, useful participation in Palmer's history is very comforting. I do believe that we will be very compatible to one another.

